

Abbreviated Articles

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The Canadian protesters aren't just truckers. Here's who has been showing up and what they want

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Full Articles

Ontario premier declares emergency, tells truckers to go home and end protest

NBC News, David K. Li, 11 February 2022

Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency on Friday and said he'll use all government resources to end a two-week protest by Canadian truckers over Covid-19 rules.

Ford said the trucker protest amounts to a "siege" of downtown Ottawa and the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Windsor and Detroit.

"It's an illegal occupation," Ford told reporters. "This is no longer a protest."

Ford told protesters to go home and threatened heavy fines — but stopped just short of saying he's ordering immediate police action to clear streets.

"I want to make it very clear that I do not, I repeat do not, direct the police," Ford said.

"We make the laws. The police enforce the laws. But again we cannot ... have people occupying cities, holding them hostage, holding millions and millions of people hostage to go to their jobs and tens and tens and tens of thousands of people (who) cannot go do their job."

Truckers had been staging a protest that had shut down Ottawa's core over various Covid-19 rules, leading the mayor of Canada's capital to declare a city state of emergency on Sunday.

Dubbed the "Freedom Convoy," hundreds of protesters have been using their trucks to block city streets, blare their horns and disrupt traffic.

Ford, the brother of late former Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, said he respects the right of truckers to protests, "but like all rights, these are not without reasonable limits."

"There is a wide difference between a demonstration that people make their point and go home and people (who) put their lives, their family's lives and communities at risk," Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones said.

"That's unfortunately what we are now seeing in Windsor and of course in Ottawa for the last number of days, over a week."

Bridge traffic has been blocked or severely restricted for five days, leading to serious economic consequences south of the border, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said.

"In Michigan, our economic momentum is at risk because commercial traffic is at a standstill at the Ambassador Bridge and heavily backed up at the Blue Water Bridge," she said in a statement on Friday. "I'm continuing to take action to ensure Michigan workers and families are supported."

The protest has also sparked backlash in both Ottawa and across Canada over alleged harassment as well as the presence of Confederate flags and flags bearing swastikas.

A slim majority of Canadians do not back the truckers' actions, according to an Ipsos poll.

Canada's Trucker Protests Could Spread

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Within a week of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, demonstrators were marching in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, and many other countries. The European and Asian protesters mimicked the style and symbolism of the protests in the United States: taking a knee, pulling down statues. In the social-media age, all protests are potentially global.

So it is now, with this month's protests in Canada, in which truckers opposed to that country's vaccination requirements have besieged the national capital and blockaded international crossings crucial to Canada's economy. The truck-blockade movement that started in Canada is being mimicked in New Zealand, France, and Belgium. U.S. law enforcement is bracing for somebody to try something similar south of the border on Super Bowl Sunday, of all holy days. Much of the money donated in support of the Canadian protests has been raised internationally, especially in the United States. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, and presidential son Donald Trump Jr. are only some of the Republicans who have voiced support for the protesters. The style and symbolism of this event, too, seem strangely nonlocal. One of the most photographed movements of the protests has been a man on horseback hoisting a trump 2024 flag in downtown Ottawa. Confederate flags and MAGA hats have been adopted into a global library of anti-establishment iconography.

The effects of the protests are becoming global too. Trucks are obstructing the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit. That's the busiest of all the border crossings between the United States and Canada, crucial to moving auto parts. Obstructions have been reported at border crossings in Alberta and Manitoba as well. Another convoy is trying to impede the main road from Manitoba to Ontario. Yesterday, protesters attempted to block access to Ottawa's airport.

The blockades are very much a rogue movement. They have been condemned by the Canadian Trucking Alliance and Canada's Teamsters Union. About 90 percent of Canadian truck drivers are vaccinated; comparatively few of those protesting are professional truck drivers. The protesters are not anti-lockdown. They are anti-vaccination. The spark for the protests was a requirement that truckers be vaccinated to cross the U.S.-Canada border. This is not a movement of "working class" protesters against remote, affluent elites. The burden of the protests has fallen on Ottawa residents, whose streets have been paralyzed, and Canadian autoworkers, who face factory shutdowns because of cross-border disruptions.

About 32 percent of Canadians express broad sympathy with the protests. That's not popularity, but it's not crippling unpopularity either. Justin Trudeau is Canada's prime minister on the strength of 32.6 percent of the votes cast in the 2021 federal election. And although the most obnoxious acts of the protesters have provoked almost universal revulsion, it's by no means clear that they will ultimately lose this trial of political strength. Voters everywhere expect governments to keep order, and if governments cannot or will not do the job, the people in charge of those governments will pay the political price. There may not be a lot of room for the truckers' popularity to rise. There's a lot of room for Trudeau's popularity to fall. This drama is unfolding on Ottawa streets, framed on television screens by the skyline of the Canadian federal Parliament. Canadians will not blame the chief of the Ottawa police force if the blockades continue. They will not blame the Ontario provincial police, or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or the provincial premiers. It's the authority of the national government that is being challenged—it is the national economy that is being disrupted—and it's the head of the national government to whom Canadians will look for a resolution. If Trudeau does not or cannot deliver that resolution, he will pay the price.

This crisis may be building to something truly dangerous. Trudeau has to act, but Canada may lack the means to act effectively and decisively enough to end the protests without harm to protesters or police. A big show of force may persuade protesters to return home quietly. A not-so-big show may tempt them to resist and see what happens. The province of Ontario will reportedly introduce emergency legislation today. That could test the issue.

If a crackdown goes bad in Canada, the negative consequences may not be confined to the country. The truck disruptions have shocked Canadians because Canada is generally an extremely law-abiding place. To a great extent, Canada still is law-abiding: When a court ordered the truck protesters to cease blaring their horns, the horn-blaring ceased. If the practice of using trucks as rolling fortifications were to spread south of the border, however, it could mobilize American protesters, who are less law-compliant than their Canadian counterparts.

Politically motivated violence in America has been on the rise in the past half-dozen years: the riots and looting in U.S. cities after Floyd's murder; the takeover of a portion of Portland, Oregon, by left-wing militants; the attempted kidnapping of Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer by anti-vaccination extremists, all preceding the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol—and whatever comes next.

Maybe this latest form of performative intimidation is only being road tested in Ottawa. It could be coming to American cities soon.

The Canadian trucker convoy is an unpopular uprising

Vox, Zack Beauchamp, 11 February 2022

Since January 28, Canada's capital city of Ottawa has been under siege by a convoy of angry truckers — a two-week running protest that has drawn support from right-wing extremists in Canada and abroad.

The so-called "freedom convoy" is nominally protesting a vaccine mandate for truckers, implemented in mid-January on both sides of the US-Canada border. But the demonstrations have swiftly ballooned into a broader far-right movement, with some demonstrators waving Confederate and Nazi flags. Protester demands include an end to all Covid-19 restrictions in Canada and the resignation of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The demonstrators, which have included as many as 8,000 people at their peak, have terrorized Ottawa: blockading streets, harassing citizens, forcing business closures, and honking their extremely loud horns all night. Ottawa police, who have proven some combination of unwilling and unable to restore order, have even set up a special hotline to deal with a deluge of alleged hate crimes stemming from the protests. In the first week of February, it received over 200 calls.

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson has declared a state of emergency, and Trudeau's government has deployed hundreds of Royal Canadian Mounted Police to the protests. As the situation in Ottawa continues, the

freedom convoy movement has expanded across the country. Demonstrators have shut down at least two border crossings between Canada and the United States.

But while the protests are generating a lot of noise and attention, the eruption actually points up a counterintuitive fact: The Canadian far right is weak and ineffectual, especially when it comes to pandemic restrictions.

Canada's provinces have generally employed strict Covid-19 measures such as school mask mandates and vaccine passports, including during the recent omicron surge. They have enjoyed broad public support in doing so; even the strictest restrictions are less controversial in Canada than in the US. The current demonstration is quite unpopular with the general public, divisive even inside the center-right Conservative party.

This doesn't mean the movement will accomplish nothing. It has already contributed to a revolt against the Conservative party's leader and is serving as an important organizing node for far-rightists. The border crossing blockage is putting more stress on the US-Canada supply chain, costing (by one estimation) \$300 million a day in economic damage. Internationally, the freedom convoy has inspired copycat efforts in both the United States and France.

But it's important to understand the broader context in Canada. News coverage of the convoy, especially from sympathetic anchors on Fox News, may lead Americans to believe that Canada is in the midst of a far-right popular uprising. In reality, the mainstream consensus in Canada about Covid-19, and the nation's institutions in general, is holding. The so-called trucker movement is on the fringe, including among Canadian truckers — some 90 percent of whom are vaccinated.

They are angry because they have lost.

Canadians against "truckers"

I've been to Canada several times since the beginning of the pandemic, driving over the Peace Bridge from Buffalo into southern Ontario. The differences between the two countries become apparent almost immediately upon crossing the border. At gas stations and rest stops in upstate New York, masks are treated as optional at best; once you cross the border, virtually everyone you see indoors is masked up. When my daughter developed a fever from an ear infection, I was asked to provide a negative Covid-19 test upon entry to an urgent care facility; without one, we were told we would have been turned away.

My experiences reflect the country's much stricter government policies. Vaccine passports, school mask mandates, and even bans on private indoor gatherings larger than 10 people have been widely used across Canadian provinces. Even Alberta, the prairie heart of Canadian conservatism, had imposed all three — with Jason Kenney, the province's Conservative premier, arguing in September that a passport system was "the only way to cut viral transmission without destroying businesses."

Alberta and several other Canadian provinces are now in the process of lifting some of the more burdensome restrictions. But this generally reflects the omicron surge's ebb rather a wave of public opposition; in Ontario, home to Ottawa and Toronto, the Conservative provincial government is following a preexisting reopening script pegged to a decline in case counts and hospitalizations. Some provincial leaders, like Quebec's François Legault, noted that reopening plans were in no way influenced by trucker shenanigans.

There is a reason Canadian politicians have taken this stance: Poll after poll finds Canadians have widely supported restrictive pandemic policies at both the federal and provincial levels. This is not to say they enjoy restrictions on their freedoms — who does? — but simply that they believe the government has an obligation to act when case counts are high.

This is especially clear when it comes to coercive vaccination rules, ostensibly the freedom convoy's main target.

The January edition of the Covid-19 Monitor, a regular survey of Canadian attitudes about the pandemic, finds that about three-quarters of Canadians support vaccine passports for indoor dining and gatherings. Strikingly, 70 percent would “strongly” or “somewhat” support a vaccine mandate for all eligible adults — a vastly more restrictive policy than any province has actually attempted. What’s more, the researchers behind Covid-19 Monitor find that, on most issues, “support has remained relatively stable” throughout the pandemic — strong evidence that this isn’t just a short-term blip caused by omicron.

It makes sense, then, that the trucker protest is widely unpopular.

The polling firm Innovative Research Group has conducted three separate rounds of polling since the beginning of the convoy, and found that public opposition has risen as the protest has gone on. In their most recent survey, conducted February 4-9, a scant 29 percent of Canadians expressed support for “the idea of the protest” while 53 percent disapproved.

A separate survey by Léger, released on February 8, found that 62 percent of Canadians oppose “the message that the trucker convoy protests are conveying of no vaccine mandates and less public health measures.” Sixty-five percent of respondents agreed that the demonstrators represented a “small minority of Canadians who are thinking only about themselves.”

Why the trucker protest matters, even though they’re losing
It’s worth emphasizing that a movement does not have to be popular with a majority to have influence.

During the trucker protests, an uprising against Conservative Party Leader Erin O’Toole succeeded in toppling him from the top spot. The challenge was fueled, in part, by Conservative members of Parliament frustrated by O’Toole’s equivocal stance on the convoy, with many in the ranks calling on the party to embrace the truckers.

The leadership challenge points to the bigger effect of the protest: It is a rare action by the Canadian far right that’s gaining mainstream attention and backing. “Even if the trucker protests do recede, their show of strength has won them demonstrable support abroad, including financial support, and has established large communities online that could fuel future activity,” the New York Times’s Max Fisher writes.

The protests have had notable international reach, becoming a cause célèbre for anti-restriction conservatives in the US and Europe. Sixty-three percent of the donations to the truckers’ now-removed GoFundMe came from the United States; the American right reportedly played an important role in getting the protest off the ground. It’s also now inspiring actions elsewhere: An American convoy is scheduled to depart from California on March 4, with Washington as its ultimate destination. A similar French effort is already on its way to Paris, with police vowing to bar its entry to the capital.

Yet the fact that so much of the so-called trucker movement’s support seems to be coming from abroad is telling.

The reality is that a combination of factors, ranging from the structure of the Canadian political system to widespread acceptance of liberal cultural values, have made its government especially resistant to far-right radicalism. On issues ranging from Covid-19 to immigration to abortion, the mainstream consensus has held.

The freedom convoy’s willingness to disrupt life in Canada’s capital is less a sign of an incipient popular uprising than the lashing out of a minority that has little influence at the ballot box.

Canadian trucker protest: A day in the life

Fox Business, Kristen Altus, 11 February 2022

In the early morning hours on Friday, Ottawa’s Ambassador Bridge was quiet, with not many people in sight. Instead, the low hums of semi-trucks gently rattled the streets surrounding Canada’s Parliament.

The Freedom Convoy has gained strength and numbers since the movement started nearly three weeks ago by Canadian truckers protesting the country's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

"One of the main reasons is for kids, and also for all the injustice that we've been living for the past two years," protester and contractor Danick Venne told FOX Business' Jeff Flock.

"I'm sick and tired of people trying to tell me they can vaccinate my children without my permission," a truck driver named David added. "I'm sick and tired of them canceling school when there's no reason for it."

David said the campaign is bigger than truckers' rights: "We haven't even gotten started about the carbon tax that's killing the trucking industry."

Although he's not a truck driver himself, Venne said he traveled to volunteer for the cause, providing security, food, coffee, fuel, even helping to build a tall, wooden podium so voices can be heard loud and clear.

"I come here and volunteer and give help and love to everybody," Venne, while standing in front of red and white painted signs that read "Canada loves truckers," "Freedom Heroes," and "One Love," explained.

"Every time I have spare time, I go help," he continued. "I go serve coffee if I can, or anything I will do to help."

Another group of non-truckers joined the protesters to serve hot food on Ottawa's closed roads, further attesting to the outpouring of community support.

"We had an officer donate \$600 in food," one of the men said. "Ridgetown Tim Horton's supported us with Tim cards to give the people."

While the Freedom Convoy protesters share a passionate, communal spirit, their ongoing bridge blockade is starting to create economic problems.

Ford and Stellantis, the parent company of Chrysler, say the four-day standstill on the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit to the city of Windsor, Ontario, will pile more problems onto an already-strained supply chain.

The disruptions have even forced Ford to cut work shifts at some of its U.S. and Canadian factories.

"This interruption on the Detroit/Windsor bridge hurts customers, autoworkers, suppliers, communities and companies on both sides of the border that are already two years into parts shortages resulting from the global semiconductor issue, COVID and more," Ford told FOX Business in a statement Thursday.

"We hope this situation is resolved quickly because it could have widespread impact on all automakers in the U.S. and Canada," the company continued.

But the future of the Freedom Convoy remains unclear. An Ontario court Thursday froze millions of dollars in the GiveSendGo account of "Freedom Convoy 2022" on Thursday which had raked more than \$10 million in donations.

The Associated Press also reported Friday that the Biden administration has urged Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to use federal powers and end the standoff.

Freedom Convoy's lead attorney Keith Wilson called out Trudeau for characterizing the protesters as "Nazis" and a "fringe minority" Wednesday on "The Evening Edit."

"It's troubling that the prime minister of our country is now characterizing hardworking Canadians, who during COVID, delivered food and critical supplies, and put themselves at risk to whatever risk imposed," Wilson said. "And now, suddenly, for political opportunism, he's characterizing these hardworking truckers who are trying to protect their charter rights."

The Canadian protesters aren't just truckers. Here's who has been showing up and what they want
CNN, Paula Newton, 11 February 2022

A massive protest by Canadian truckers and others against Covid-19 mandates has been growing for weeks, crippling three US border crossings and downtown Ottawa -- with no end in sight.

So, why are the demonstrations happening now? What exactly are they about? And what's being done to address them? Here are some key questions and answers about Canada's Covid-19 protests.
What are truckers protesting in Canada?

Thousands of truckers are participating in the so-called "Freedom Convoy," fighting a vaccine mandate that is forcing all Canadian truckers crossing the US-Canadian border to be fully vaccinated or face quarantine in their homes for two weeks when they return.

The rule went into effect in mid-January in Canada and January 22 in the United States. The US Department of Homeland Security now requires noncitizens entering the United States via border crossings or ferry terminals along the US northern and southern borders be fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

Before this mandate, truckers were exempted from the vaccine requirement and permitted to cross the border, at times testing for Covid-19, even during the 18-month period that the border was closed to nonessential traffic. Truckers were considered vital to keeping supply chains functioning normally.

Nearly 90% of Canada's truckers are fully vaccinated and eligible to cross the border, according to the Canadian government. So, the protesting truckers represent a "small, fringe minority," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, adding early on that his government did not expect the vaccine mandate to significantly affect supply chains.

How have the protests evolved?

The Freedom Convoy of truckers began its protest in January in Canada's western provinces, with the goal of reaching the nation's capital, Ottawa, and continuing to protest until the vaccine mandate was lifted.

On its cross-country journey, the protest has attracted support from thousands more Canadians, even some who are fully vaccinated, who say they want all Covid-19 preventative measures dropped, including mask mandates, lockdowns and restrictions on gatherings.

A large, noisy convoy, including hundreds of trucks and other vehicles, descended January 29 on Ottawa. Since then, they have snarled traffic and honked often and loudly. Protesters in more than 60 vehicles also disrupted traffic at Ottawa International Airport on Thursday, circling the arrivals and departure terminals, airport officials said.

In several other large Canadian cities and towns, protest crowds emerged over the first weekend of February with hundreds of trucks and thousands of protesters. Rallies also took place in Toronto, Quebec City, Vancouver and Winnipeg.

Meantime, Friday marked the fifth day protesters impeded access to the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor, Ontario -- the busiest international crossing in North America.

In addition, a mix of semi-trailers and farm equipment shut down the border crossing connecting Emerson, Manitoba, and Pembina, North Dakota, according to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Manitoba. The Coutts access point between Alberta and Montana has also been blocked.

Similar protests soon could erupt in the United States, including around Sunday's Super Bowl in Southern California, American officials warn. Right-wing media outlets have raised the prospect of like-minded rallies in the US and offered positive coverage of those in Canada.

What do the protesters want?

Protesters will remain in Ottawa "for as long as it takes for governments across Canada to end all mandates" associated with Covid-19, Freedom Convoy organizers said last week in a statement.

Some want Trudeau to speak with them and hear their opposition to the mandates and restrictions, those protesters told CNN. Trudeau has no intention of meeting with protesters, who hold views "unacceptable" to most Canadians, he has said.

What has the impact been on Canadians?

The blockades have slowed the movement of goods and caused production problems at car manufacturing plants along the border. Ford, General Motors and Stellantis have all announced auto production issues in Canada.

The Ambassador Bridge "is too essential to both of our national economies, and ... puts a lot of bread on the table for our families on both sides of the border," Windsor, Ontario, Mayor Drew Dilkens told CNN this week.

In Ottawa, residents and service providers in the downtown core feel like hostages in a city under siege, they've told CNN. Most businesses in the area have been forced to close; they include a large mall next to the protest site.

Dozens of trucks remain in Ottawa's downtown core in what local officials have described as an "occupation." The police chief calls it "unlawful," as property damage, thefts and mischief have been reported, along with hundreds of alleged hate crimes. Some 1,000 calls related to the demonstration have been received, plus 25 arrests made and more than 1,500 traffic and other tickets issued, police said Thursday.

A judge this week signed a temporary injunction that prevents protesters in Ottawa from using horns during their demonstrations, court documents show.

Dilkens is expected in court Friday to seek an injunction that would expand police's authority to respond to the protesters, he said Thursday. If the protesters are "unwilling to move on," the mayor said, tow trucks and equipment would be brought in to help "move the vehicles out of the way" to reopen the border crossing.

What has PM Justin Trudeau said about all this?

Trudeau, who is fully vaccinated and boosted, has said the protesters do not represent the vast majority of Canadians, about 80% of whom have opted to get fully vaccinated. Most believe public health restrictions save lives, the Prime Minister has said.

He implored protesters parked in trucks right outside the parliament building Monday to end their demonstration.

"Individuals are trying to blockade our economy, our democracy and our fellow citizens' daily lives. It has to stop," Trudeau said during an emergency debate in Ottawa that marked his first public appearance since isolating after he and some members of his family contracted the coronavirus.

The Prime Minister acknowledged that protesters have a right to voice their concerns but said residents don't deserve to be harassed in their own neighborhoods.

"This pandemic has sucked for all Canadians, but Canadians know the way to get through it is continuing to listen to science, continuing to lean on each other, continuing to be there for each other," Trudeau said after underscoring that Canadians are tired of Covid-19 health restrictions.

By Thursday, the Prime Minister was employing stronger language in a series of tweets: "The illegal blockades and occupations happening across the country ... (are) harming the communities they're taking place in -- and they're hurting jobs, businesses, and our country's economy."

Trudeau had spoken with Windsor's mayor "about the illegal blockade of the Ambassador Bridge ... because it is causing real harm to workers and economies on both sides of the border," he tweeted. He'd also spoken with opposition party leaders, asking all lawmakers to "denounce these illegal acts -- and to call for an end to these blockades."

About 80% of Canadians are vaccinated. Why so much angst now?

Almost 4 of every 5 Canadians are vaccinated, according to the Canadian government. However, provincial governments and the federal government have enforced various vaccine mandates, stoking ire among those politically opposed and fatigue among others as the pandemic hits its two-year mark.

At the federal and provincial level, Canada has enforced some of the strictest Covid-19 measures in the world, with widespread mask mandates and restrictions on the size of gatherings, not only at large events and restaurants but also in private homes.

A vocal minority of Canadians says they agree with the truckers' protest, saying is it time to drop most Covid-19 restrictions. With so many Canadians complying for so long with vaccine and mask mandates and other Covid-19 measures, some say public health officials and government leaders are now going too far.

As one couple who said they are fully vaccinated feel they did their part and now they want to move on, they told CNN.

Had Canadians staged serious protests over Covid-19 rules before this?

Various smaller protests took place across the country against health measures and mandates in 2020 and 2021. However, this is the largest and most widespread protest of its kind to date during the pandemic.

What Covid-19 rules are in place for Canadians who are not truckers?

Several provinces are beginning to drop some mitigation measures and allow the reopening of restaurant dining rooms, theaters, cinemas and gyms, albeit with capacity restrictions.

Decisions about most of these health restrictions and how and when to ease them are determined not by the Trudeau government but by individual provinces.

There is still a federal vaccine mandate for passengers traveling by air domestically or internationally. In addition, all federal public servants are required to be fully vaccinated as a condition of employment. How might the Covid-19 protests end?

Possible solutions include persuading protesters to disburse voluntarily; the government giving into demands; and police removing the protesters. Military force is considered highly unlikely as Canada's armed forces are not a police force and they "are not involved in law enforcement in this situation," Defense Minister Anita Anand told CNN.

The Trudeau government will send more officers to protests across the country, saying Thursday the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada's national police force, continues to show decisive action.

"The RCMP are going to be sending additional reinforcements to Ottawa. I also can advise that the RCMP will be sending reinforcements to Windsor and in addition to that the RCMP have added additional resources at Coutts, in Alberta," said Marco Mendicino, Canada's public safety minister.

"Our top priority is to make sure that these illegal blockades end," he said.